



## Divine Retribution Again: Is The Current Economic Crisis God's Punishment?\*

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### Abstract:

For many centuries the faithful believed, and some still take it to be true that certain instances of suffering are God's punishment for the sins committed. The current economic crisis has raised once more the idea of divine retribution for human immoralities. Certain politicians, clerics among others from different religious traditions argue that the latest economic crisis is God's punishment for the financial wrongdoings. Is the notion of divine retribution making its come back? Has this idea a strong religious foundation? How far this argument coherent? These are some of the questions to be sought answer in this paper in the context of the current economic crisis with references to Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

**Key Words:** The problem of evil, divine retribution, the current economic crisis.

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One of the religious responses to the problem of human suffering is that God punishes the wicked for his or her immoralities by inflicting pain and sorrow. Since He, as a good supreme being, cannot be thought to be doing wrong and injustice, the sufferer is thought to deserve that affliction. For many centuries Jews, Christians and Muslims believed, and some still continue to believe that some sufferings and death in this world are God's punishment for the sins committed. Whenever a disaster happens,

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whether it is a moral or natural one, some followers of these theist faiths associate it with divine retribution somehow.

However, this very notion, also called retributive suffering, seems to be challenged in the same religious traditions starting with their scriptures. Accordingly, evil and suffering may not necessarily a divine retribution for human wickedness. The destruction of the innocent as well as the guilty, and the birth of disabled without any guilt are, logically speaking, some indications that evil and suffering, at least some of them, cannot be a divine punishment. Furthermore, there has been a growing tendency among modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers in modern times towards the latter position even though there are still those who accept that suffering is a punishment for sin.

The current economic crisis has raised again the idea of divine retribution for human immoralities in certain parts of the world. Certain politicians, clerics, theologians, some of them fundamentalist, from different religious traditions argue that the current economic recession, rising unemployment experienced today is God's punishment for the capitalist economic system. The financial crisis is allegedly God's long awaited answer to the supplications of the oppressed people of the world. Is the notion of divine retribution making its come back? Has this idea a religious foundation as it is often argued? How far this argument coherent in view of the global economic recession? These are some of the questions sought answer in this paper pointing out similarities and differences in Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

It has been officially a year since Lehman Brothers, one of the largest U.S private banking firms, bankrupted as the landmark of the current financial crises. Having broken out first in America it spread out the whole world as a result of globalisation. Since America is one of the richest countries of the world and it has economic dealings with the rest of the world, its financial dire straits have also led into turmoil the rich economies of the world such as that of Europe, Russia and China as well as developing and underdeveloped countries. Because of the tumultuous events on economy, people around the world are feeling a range of negative emotions such as uncertainty, anxiety, fear, disappointment, distress, and perhaps guilt. For they face to lose their jobs, savings, houses, and positive outlook towards life.

As in the old crises, some people today as well, among them clerics, politicians and ordinary people seem to be convinced that the current economic crisis is an instance of divine punishment. For instance, James



Bidgood, an Australian MP, told that "the global financial crisis was the product of God's judgement on the actions of bankers and that the world was now at the End of Days".<sup>1</sup> In addition, Mr. Bidgood asserted that the financial structure consisting of one-world bank and one world monetary system is the Biblical prophecy of the End Times referring apparently to the Book of Revelation. The Cardinal Christoph Schohborn of Austrian Church in Vienna also described the current crisis as divine punishment for human beings for not doing what they need to do.<sup>2</sup>

Among others from the Islamic world Ismail Haniya, the leader of the Palestinian group Hamas, announced that the current financial crisis was the punishment of God for whom he called "the criminals". He told a Friday congregation in the Gaza Strip that the United States in his own words, "deprived our people of money and now God has deprived them of money. They besieged our people and now they are besieged by the punishment of God".<sup>3</sup> Here Haniya refers to the economic blockade on Palestinians in Gaza which was imposed after Hamas won a parliamentary election three years ago. It is possible to prolong this list. Just to cut short, it suffices to say that the idea of retributive judgement has been making its come back in certain quarters. Therefore, I believe that there is a need to have a look again to the problem of retributive suffering.

Retribution, originally coming from Latin *retribution* meaning repayment, is defined in *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* as "ethically, retaliation for a wrong that is done."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the notion of retribution is based on the relation between immorality and its punishment. Accordingly, pain, suffering, and disasters caused either by human free will or by natural hazards are taken to be God's punishment for the sins committed. The belief in divine retribution has been one of the classical explanations in the instances of disasters and crises in three theistic traditions; namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

They all seem to suggest that there is a correlation between suffering and sin. Generally speaking, since God is just in essence, injustice and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/financial-crisis-is-all-gods-work-says-mp-20081204-6rpa.html> (16/07/2009).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Dunya/SonDakika.aspx?aType=SonDakika&ArticleID=1002663&Kategori=dunya&b=Kliseden%20kriz%20yorumu:%20Allahin%20bir%20cezasi> (16/07/2009).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/10/17/58417.html> (16/07/2009).

<sup>4</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 239.



wrong cannot be attributed to him. If there is suffering in the world, and if there is God who is the Creator, He must be the ultimate cause of evil as well. If He inflicts suffering on anyone, He cannot do it unjustly without any reason.

One may find ample references to the correlation between sin and punishment in the sacred books of these three religions. A large proportion of Tanakh, the Jewish Scripture, considers suffering as a direct consequence of sin.<sup>5</sup> This explanation seems to be based on two Biblical doctrines, the belief in the just and powerful God and the covenant of Israel with him.<sup>6</sup> The doctrine of all-powerful and just God lies at the heart of Jewish faith. Moreover, the covenant signifies that the people of Israel promised to God in the old times to obey his commandments. They are warned from the beginning that the violation of divine commandments brings about disasters, destruction and suffering. Therefore, the notion of covenant implies a possible reward and punishment. For instance, *Jeremiah* 14: 10 reads, "Thus said the Lord concerning the people: 'Truly, they love to stray, they have not restrained their feet; so the Lord has no pleasure in them. Now He will recall their iniquity and punish their sin.'<sup>7</sup> Since the people of Israel then violated the covenant, humiliation, defeat and pain were waiting for them. Most of the prophetic assertions presuppose a close link between a national disaster and a national sin.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, certain catastrophes emerge either as a result of a wrong that the whole nation perpetuated or as an outcome of a widespread wickedness. In the second passage of the *Shema* (in Hebrew "Hear"),<sup>9</sup> *Deuteronomy* 11: 13-21, God warns the Jews that if they worship other gods, there will be drought, and, consequently, they will have to leave soon the God given land. Similarly, the curses that shall visit the Israelites are enumerated in *Deuteronomy* 28: 15-68 if they do not observe God's commandments and laws.

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<sup>5</sup> For an exploration of the idea of retributive suffering in three theistic faiths see, Muhsin Akbas, *The Problem of Evil and Suffering and Theodicy in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Thought* (PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Gordis, "The Temptation of Job-Tradition Versus Experience in Religion," *Judaism*, 4 (1955), 198.

<sup>7</sup> The version of the Hebrew Bible referred to here is *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Goldenberg, "Early Rabbinic Explanations of the Destruction of Jerusalem," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33, no. 1-2, (Spring-Autumn 1982), 517.

<sup>9</sup> The *Shema*, the Jewish declaration of faith in one God, is composed of three Biblical passages, *Deut.* 6: 4-9, *Deut.* 11: 13-21 and *Num.* 15: 37-41.



The idea of divine retribution is also a Biblical paradigm in explaining certain historical misdeeds and their consequences. The classical example of this explanation in the Bible is Adam's sin and the Fall; that is, the exile from the Paradise. When Adam and Eve ate a fruit from the forbidden tree, God punished them with exile from Paradise by throwing them onto the earth and to a life that is full of struggle (*Gen. 3: 17-19*). Furthermore, God destroys humankind with the deluge when they do not listen to Noah's warnings and continue with their wickedness (*Gen. 6: 11-13*). Moreover, God destroys Sodom and Gomorra for their grave sin (*Gen. 18: 20-22*).

Additionally, some natural phenomena such as plague (*Ex. 7-11*), disease (*Num. 11: 33; 2 Sam. 24: 15*), drought (*Jer. 14: 1-7*), famine (*Ezek. 5: 12, 16*), earthquake (*Isa. 29: 6; Am. 8: 8*), lightning (*Num. 11: 1*) are also regarded by the Biblical authors as instruments of divine punishment. As David Kraemer, the scholar of Talmud and Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological Seminary, points out, for the pious people of Israel, evil occurrences are "expressions of God's justice, a justice that insists upon obedience to God's will and repays nonobedience with suffering in various degrees."<sup>10</sup> When the people of Israel violate divine law, the conditions of covenant, disasters visit them.

For centuries Christians believed that this Jewish idea is also reflected in certain New Testament passages. Those who follow the literal understanding of the New Testament generally advocate the view that human suffering is a punishment for sin even for today as emerged in the face of the global financial crisis.

For Paul, who was formerly a Pharisee, the justice of God is important. The work of Jesus can only be explained in terms of divine justice. Since God is just, then retribution is an inevitable consequence. The story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira in *Acts 5: 1-11* is, for instance, taken to be a typical example of the retributive suffering. The sudden death of these people is understood by the author of the *Acts* as punishment for their transgressions. Since Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter the apostle about the proceeds of their land they kept back, they fell down and died in front of Peter for violating a principle of the Church. Therefore, their death was considered as divine punishment for their lies.

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<sup>10</sup> David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.



In addition, the theme of the wrath of God in the New Testament is seen as an expression of retributive judgement of God. Paul talks about divine wrath manifesting itself in the world (*Rom.* 1: 18-32 and *1 Thes.* 2: 16) as well as in the hereafter (*Rom.* 2: 5, 8 and *1 Thes.* 5: 9). Stephen H. Travis, a British Christian theologian, in his *Christ and the Judgment of God* maintains that Paul uses the term the wrath of God in both a personal and impersonal sense, and that divine wrath is manifested for unbelievers, never for Christians.<sup>11</sup>

The Jewish idea of sickness as a punishment for sin seems to be echoed also in the New Testament. In *1 Corinthians* 11: 27-30 Paul attributes the weakness, illness and death of the congregation at Corinth to their "unworthy manner" in their observation of the Lord's Supper. In addition, Jesus' miracles of healing are occasionally referred to in support of the idea that illness is a penalty for sin. *Luke* 5: 17-26 reports that Jesus heals a paralysed man by forgiving his sins as if the sickness is the requital of sin.<sup>12</sup>

The Qur'an, like Jewish and Christian Scriptures, suggests that some natural evils such as flood, earthquake and drought are punishment for human sins. The failure to become a righteous person and to follow God's commandments sometimes brings about suffering and disasters in this life. Although ultimate reward and punishment is in the hereafter ("*al-akhira*"), there are also references in the Qur'an to suffering as a punishment for sin in this world. This notion is concisely expressed in the following verse, "But as for those who disbelieved, I will sternly punish them in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have no supporters" (*Āl-i 'Imran* 3: 55). The reason for the punishment of this kind is seen in terms of human failure in adopting a right attitude in the face of test. The Qur'an expresses this notion as follows, "And We have not wronged them, but they wronged themselves..." (*Hud*, 11: 100). Therefore, what is befallen on human beings is because of what he or she has done.

Perhaps the most striking example of this kind of explanation comes in the Qur'an's account of the destruction of people of old. The Qur'an narrates that some past nations to whom such prophets as Nuh (Noah), Hud, Salih, and Lut (Lot) were sent, had been destroyed because of their immoral acts and disbelief. Hence, the Qur'an warns the unbe-

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<sup>11</sup> S. H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingtone, Hants: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd., 1986), 31.

<sup>12</sup> cf. *Mark* 2: 1-12 and *Matthew* 9: 1-8.



liever reminding them of the fate of the past nations, and calls them to "the true path." A half of the chapter *al-'Ankabut* describes the destruction of some ancient people as divine punishment for their wickedness, immoralities (29: 11-40).

However, certain scriptural references and views of some religious thinkers from three traditions seem to be reluctant to apply the idea of divine retribution to all instances of suffering. There are a few reasons for that. Some occurrences of suffering are thought to be warning, test and discipline. Apart from that the instances of the suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked in the world seem to be challenge that suffering is divine punishment for human immoralities. If the financial crisis is punishment for what certain Americans did, what was the sin of those who have not taken a part in this problem but lost their jobs, and as a result their whole family badly affected? The Jewish people in the past seem to have realised that every sufferer is not wicked, or that many suffer innocently. Among them, there must have been some children or pious subjected to affliction as well. It would not be a proper answer to say that they suffered because they did not obey divine law or commit immoral conduct. What sin could a child have? Their answer was that the innocent suffers because of the sins of his or her ancestors. *Exodus* 20: 5-6 reads,

"You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

The psalmist cries for help from God not to punish them for the sins of their ancestors: "Do not remember against us the iniquities of our forefathers" (*Ps.* 79: 8). However, not every Biblical writer seems to be happy with this thought. Ezekiel, for instance, refuses to accept the idea of suffering as a punishment for the ancestral sins. He professes,

"The person who sins, he alone shall die a child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone."

Yet, even for Ezekiel the innocent might be a victim of the sins of the wicked community. Yet, this does not show that sin passes from one generation to another. It is only a natural consequence of the failure of the corporate responsibility within a society. Since people live in communities, something that one does inevitably affects others living in that com-



munity as well. That is why Ezekiel accuses the people of Israel then for the downfall of Jerusalem (16: 2).

Besides, certain Biblical writers seem to object to the idea that suffering is a punishment for sin on the grounds of the prosperity of the wicked. Jeremiah, for instance, openly challenges this notion although he is well aware of who shall be triumphant. He cries, "You will win, O Lord, if I make claim against You, yet I shall present charges against You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (*Jer.* 12: 1). It seems that Jeremiah holds onto God's promise that He was going to speak through Jeremiah and to stand by him (1: 7-10). Perhaps for that reason, Jeremiah continues to believe in God and divine justice.

A similar approach is found in the *Book of Job*. As the Biblical epitome of suffering, Job flatly refuses to accept the idea of suffering as a punishment. Having negated the similar charges against him voiced by his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job (who is not so in himself, *Job* 9: 35) questions divine justice. Moreover, Job defies God by saying that "He destroys the blameless and the guilty" (*Job* 9: 20-22). Nevertheless, Job, like Jeremiah, surrenders to divine wisdom in the end repenting and confessing his ignorance of God's ways even though he had no apparent answer from Him for his questions.

In the case of the New Testament, *Luke* 13: 1-5 appears to renounce the idea of retributive suffering, at least in the case of Galileans suffering under Pilate and those who were killed under the tower of Siloam. Jesus says, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? No, I tell you" (*Luke* 13: 2-3). Commenting on the same text, Schmid, however, contends that "when Jesus encounters special cases of misfortune he sees in them on the one hand punishment that is deserved, on the other a warning to others."<sup>13</sup> While suffering of Galileans and of the victims of the tower of Siloam is punishment, these disasters are, on the other hand, warning to the rest of the community. Because Jesus finishes the passage with a warning, "unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did" (*Luke* 13: 5).

*John* 9: 1-3 is also a significant passage in which Jesus explicitly rejects the idea of retributive suffering in the case of a blind man. The disci-

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<sup>13</sup> Josef Schmid, "Suffering: Later Judaism and the New Testament," in Johannes B. Bauer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 894.





ples of Jesus enquiry about the reason for blindness of the man: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (*John* 9: 2). Jesus replies, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (*John* 9: 3).

This passage is important for three reasons. Firstly, it suggests that the disciples of Jesus must have held the retributive explanation of suffering previously. They sounded certain that blindness was a punishment for sin, but they were not sure whether it was his or his ancestors' sins. Secondly, Jesus seems to deny the view that suffering is a punishment of sin in that particular case. Thirdly, Jesus proclaims that his blindness is "an opportunity for God's glory to be seen."<sup>14</sup> Characteristically, the Gospel of John affirms that afflictions including Jesus' suffering and crucifixion are an occasion for glorification of God.

This last point is also reiterated in *John* 11: 4 concerning the illness of Lazarus. When Jesus is informed that Lazarus is ill, he says, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory. So that the Son of God may be glorified through it." As is seen here, the New Testament's interest is clearly directed towards suffering as the opportunity of glorifying God.<sup>15</sup> This seems to be a relatively comforting. The reason for that is that this account offers consolation only if it is you who are chosen for the manifestation of the glory of God. Otherwise, it does not solve the problem if it does not make it worse. Why some are worthy of his glorification, the others are not? Does that mean that who suffers is more deserved than the one who escapes that fate? Obviously, it is not to correct to assume that a good and just God could choose some of His creation over others without any reason.

It appears that some modern Christian scholars tend to deny that the New Testament offers a retributive answer to suffering at all. Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973), a Welsh Biblical scholar, takes the theme of the wrath of God in an impersonal sense rather than an expression of retributive judgement. Dodd argues that Paul "retains the concept of 'the wrath of God'...not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe."<sup>16</sup> Dodd sug-

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel J. Simundson, *Faith under Fire: Biblical Interpretations of Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 128.

<sup>15</sup> J. Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering* (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1972), 82.

<sup>16</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932), 23.



gests that the universe has moral laws as well as natural laws operating on the grounds of cause and effect.

John Ferguson, a contemporary scholar of Christianity, interprets Jesus' pronouncement of the forgiveness in *Luke* 5: 17-26 as "the demonstration to the watching scribes and Pharisees on their own terms that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins."<sup>17</sup> Simundson, on the other hand, suggests that Jesus' saying may be understood in "a symbolic way" in the light of *Genesis* 3.<sup>18</sup> That is to say, since suffering and death is thought to have come into this world as a result of the original sin, human suffering and death can also be seen as the natural consequence of this. In this context, it was the purpose of Jesus to remove the guilt and to bring salvation to humankind. Thus, Jesus' forgiveness of the paralytic's sins is nothing else than the annulment of the original sin.

Brian Hebblethwaite, a contemporary Christian philosopher, talking of *Luke* 13: 4, maintains that Jesus "explicitly" rejected the Jewish view of suffering as a punishment for sin. The striking example is that Christ warns the disciples not to assume that the people of Siloam were exceptionally sinful.<sup>19</sup> Simundson, too, denies the existence of "deserved suffering" in this life. He writes, "These unfortunate persons who got in the way of Pilate or the Siloam tower were not worse sinners than anyone else."<sup>20</sup> In addition, Simundson takes Jesus' urge to repent in eschatological sense. That is to say, humankind will see the result of what they have done in the future.

The Qur'an also does not attribute all suffering and disaster to human immorality and unbelief. It is only one explanation, among several, to human suffering from the standpoint of God. Only God knows whether a disaster is a punishment for sin. What the sufferer can do at most is a soul-searching in an effort to determine and correct his or her faults. This is only an inward looking into one's own mental and emotional states. The following passage from the Qur'an expresses this notion: "The blind are not to blame, nor the cripple is to blame, nor are the sick to blame. Whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, He will admit him into gardens beneath which rivers flow; but he who turns away, He will inflict upon him a painful punishment." (*al-Fath*, 48: 17).

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<sup>17</sup> Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering*, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 127.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 127.



Furthermore, some of the modern Muslim scholars seem to be reluctant to accept the idea that all suffering of past generations is divine retribution. Having affirmed the Scriptural account of the destruction of people of old, Mahmoud Ayoub asserts that the Qur'anic examples of the stern punishments of the past generations are not strictly retributive but they are "corrective" and disciplinary. Because "history is God's court of justice and the instrument of His discipline."<sup>21</sup> According to Ayoub, the stories of the destruction of certain ancient people for their non-belief must be understood in the light of chapter 11 verses 100-1 of the Qur'an. That is to say that God did not punish those people out of "frustration or capricious wrath;" but the people brought the punishments on themselves with the wrongs they committed. In addition, one must also bear in mind that God wills no injustice to human beings (*Āl-i 'Imran* 3: 182). Sometimes this punishment ends with death. In this case, the fate of the ancient people is made an example, and serves as a lesson to the following generations not to repeat the same mistakes, and accordingly not to be punished.<sup>22</sup>

From a philosophical perspective, some questions, like the ones below, still wait for reasonable answers: If God is omnipotent, omniscient, just and merciful, why does He allow the innocent suffer along with the wicked? More seriously, why does He let the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper at times? Perhaps a believer can manage to hold on to his or her faith with a pious manner. However, this is not something that an unbeliever would appreciate at all. A contemporary Turkish philosopher of religion Mehmet Aydın asserts that "it cannot be defended from the standpoint of the objector that God punishes a community because of the wickedness of some other people in order that 'let that be a lesson' or that 'let me to thank God'."<sup>23</sup> While it may make sense to say that suffering is a test for someone who is alive after the trial, but it is difficult to maintain the same position when that person's suffering ends with death. In such a case, the sufferer is not alive to take a lesson from the situation.

To summarize, the idea of retributive suffering still does not seem to explain all an instances of disasters and suffering. Certain scriptural references, as seen above, and some realities of life do not seem to support this notion. One may without great difficulty observe that many wicked

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<sup>21</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 275.

<sup>22</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 275.

<sup>23</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi* (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), 152.



people die without any significant suffering, and, in some cases, the wicked often becomes more prosperous than the righteous in the world. If God is just, and punishes the sinful in this life, the questions turn out to be that why He punishes some, not others. Why should He discriminate some of his creatures over others?

Besides, there is no one apart from God to verify that a particular suffering is retribution, that is, requital for a certain immoral act. It seems that no human being is in a position to be able to determine without a doubt that a certain evil is a genuine divine retribution considering that, borrowing John Hick's notion, we are in "epistemic distance" from God.<sup>24</sup> Even the defenders of retributive suffering do not dare to claim that God informed them that certain evil is retribution. What is done is nothing else than reiterating the once popular response to evil in a religious tradition, and generalising it to encompass any evil occurrences. This seems to be true for Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions all. For our present purpose, we observe that the idea of retribution is applied to the current economic crisis.

Although certain passages of all three scriptures seem to suggest that God sometimes intervenes into human history and punishes some for their iniquities, we have today no way of knowing that a particular event such as the current financial crisis is divine retribution. Theistic faith requires that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, and acting in human history. However, one cannot claim for certain that a particular event in our time is God's retribution. We are in no position to know God's mind and intention in certain circumstances. To say that some disasters are God's retributive judgement such as the fall of Adam and Eve from the paradise is one thing, and that the current financial turmoil is a divine punishment for human wrongdoings is another thing.

On the other hand, human beings are free agents. Since they have free will and act or not accordingly, they are responsible for their actions. When one looks at the problem in question from this perspective, it is possible to see that human beings may bring many crises upon themselves

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<sup>24</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first ed., (London, The Macmillan Press, 1977), 317-8; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 119; John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 43. Hick explains the notion of epistemic distance in *Evil and the God of Love* as follows: "the reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in the coercive way in which their natural environment forces itself upon their attention... God must be a hidden deity, veiled by His creation"



or not. In this sense, it seems to me that the underlying cause of the current financial crisis is the moral one. It appears that, as Charles Dodd suggests, there are moral laws in our world governing human actions or indifference in a similar fashion like natural laws. In order to have a prosperous and happy life one needs to lead a life in accordance with the laws of nature and morality.

Keeping in mind these, let us ask: What was the main reason for this global disaster? Although I am not an economist, the often accepted event that has caused the crisis was the meltdown of the mortgage and credit market. Many people in the U. S., who could not afford to buy a new house, or whatever they wanted, took out mortgages or credits beyond their capacity from the banks or banking firms. In addition to this lending problem, natural disasters such as tornadoes and military involvements in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq have been funded by borrowing from foreigners. In short, the governments of the United States of America have overspent as her citizens have, and the debt has reached at record levels. When the American people could not afford to pay their mortgages and other credits borrowed, the financial corporations have come to experience financial problems; even many major banks have collapsed. Today many people living in an open market country are making investments, at least for their pension funds, and this directly or indirectly involves in the stock market. Hence, any market crisis affects big and small investors alike. Additionally, as a result of globalisation, economy of each country is interconnected. Since the country, which the crisis has been arisen, is America, the whole world has been badly affected. If people, especially of those who are in business enterprise, would have behaved in morally right way, all this would not most likely be expected to happen.

Therefore, the main cause of the current economic turmoil is human immorality, and the solution to this moral problem is in human sphere. What has to be done is to ask and seek answer to the questions such as where we made mistake, what consequences can be expected, what can be done to sort things out, and which precautions needs to be carried out in order to ensure security in the future. Having found the answers they need to be implemented precisely so that another economic crisis never arises again, and we do not accuse God for something we do.



**Özet:**

**İlahi Ceza Yeniden: Mevcut Ekonomik Kriz İlahi Ceza mı?**

İnanan insanlar yüzyıllarca belirli acıların işlenmiş günahların karşılığı olarak Tanrı'nın cezası olduğuna inandı, hatta bir kısmı bugün bile doğru kabul etmektedir. Mevcut ekonomik kriz, insanların kötü davranışlarının ilahi ceza olduğu görüşünü bir kez daha gündeme getirdi. Farklı inançlardan bir kısım din adamları, politikacılar, diğerleri yanında, son ekonomik krizin mali düzensizlikleri Tanrı'nın cezalandırması olduğunu iddia etmektedir. İlahi ceza düşüncesi geri gelmekte midir? Bu görüş güçlü dini temellere sahip midir? Bu iddia ne kadar tutarlıdır? Bunlar, Yahudi, Hıristiyan ve İslam geleneklerine atıflar yapılarak mevcut ekonomik kriz bağlamında burada cevapları aranacak bir takım sorulardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kötülük problem, ilahi ceza, mevcut ekonomik kriz.

